

W.P. Whitsett Lecture Series

10th ANNIVERSARY LECTURE

Donald E. Worster

Hall Distinguished Professor of American History
University of Kansas

**"Landscape with Hero:
John Wesley Powell and the Colorado Plateau"**

**California State University, Northridge
University Club
April 12, 1996
8:00 P.M.**

Donald E. Worster is a leading environmental historian of the West and a major contributor to the New Western history. Born in the Mojave desert, he grew up on the Great Plains, received his Ph.D. in history from Yale, and in 1989 became Hall Distinguished Professor of American History at the University of Kansas. Currently he is researching the thoughts and life of John Wesley Powell, the 19th century scientist, explorer, and conservationist.

As environmentalist as well as historian of the environment, Professor Worster has made creative and significant contributions in both areas. From 1981 to 1983 he served as president of the American Society for Environmental History; he has directed the Cambridge University Press series, *Studies in Environment and History*; he has been on the Board of Directors of The Land Institute and the Kansas Land Trust; he has served on the editorial board of a number of environmental journals and the *Western Historical Quarterly*; and he is currently director of the Program in Nature, Culture, and Technology at Kansas. Dr. Worster's first book, *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (1977), his edited collection of essays, *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (1988), and his *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (1993), which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, explore, respectively, the history of ecology before the mid-twentieth century, an interdisciplinary review of global environmental topics, and the relationships of history and ecology in personal essays, talks and articles.

Professor Worster's sometimes controversial interpretations have achieved widespread recognition and prestigious awards. In 1979 he applied his environmentalist perspective to the Great Plains in *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* which received the Bancroft Prize that year for the best book in American history. In looking beyond the impact of drought and high winds, Worster pointed to the destructive impact of technology and a materialistic, capitalistic culture that shaped commercial agriculture on the plains. In *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (1985), which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, Worster's provocative synthesis impressed one reviewer as "unquestionably the keystone in the arch built by environmental historians during the last twenty years." With a significant focus on California, Worster develops the concept of a "hydraulic society", the social order that built the dams, canals and irrigation systems that shaped the cities and agriculture of California and Arizona. In his contributions to the New Western history, Professor Worster has probed the relationship of the frontier to the West and the nature of the West. Building on Walter Prescott Webb's view of the West as region rather than process with aridity as the most distinguishing characteristic, Worster contends that the West derives its identity from "ecologically adapted modes of production", the life of the cowboy and sheepherder, and the life of the irrigator and water engineer. In *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (1992), Worster offers a series of essays that further define the uniqueness of the West as largely public domain that generated a lasting tension and dialogue between the federal government and westerners.

Worster's most recent book, *An Unsettled Country: Changing Landscapes of the American West* (1994) further demonstrates Worster's integration of environmental history and western history. These essays also point to his current project, the life of John Wesley Powell.

**The Department of History
California State University, Northridge**

invites you to attend the 1996

W. P. Whitsett California Lecture

by

Donald E. Worster

on

**“Landscape with Hero:
John Wesley Powell and the Colorado Plateau”**

Introduced by

Dr. Wilbur R. Jacobs

University of California, Santa Barbara

Friday, April 12, 1996

at 8:00 p.m. in the

University Club

You are also invited to a reception and dinner before the lecture. The reception begins at 5:30 P.M., with dinner at 6:30 P.M.

(As dinner seating is limited, reservations are required. To reserve, send a payment of \$20.00 per dinner—with entrée choice—to the History Department by April 8. Make checks payable to CSUN Foundation. Entrée choices: Prime Rib, Chicken Dijon, or Spinach Ricotta Ravioli.)



The W. P. Whitsett California Lecture Series was founded in 1986 as part of the Whitsett Endowment at California State University, Northridge, to honor the memory of William Paul Whitsett and his pioneering role in the history of the San Fernando Valley.

The Whitsett Lectures are designed to encourage a broader understanding and appreciation of the history, the development, and the future prospects of California and the West.

Sponsors of the lectures are the Whitsett Endowment, the CSUN History Association, Phi Alpha Theta, and the Whitsett Committee of the Department of History.

The W. P. Whitsett Lectures:

1987	Glenn Dumke, Inaugural Lecture
1988	Andrew Rolle
1989	Kevin Starr
1990	William Goetzman
1991	Doyce Nunis
1992	Martin Ridge
1993	Gloria Lothrop
1994	David Weber
1995	Richard Griswold del Castillo
1996	Donald Worster
1997	Iris Engstrand